

Aug. 8, 1944

Well darling,

My last letter was full of complaints about our inactivity and immobility - what we craved was movement & action - and boy did we get our wish! The last two days have been so crammed with thrilling experiences I scarce know where or how to begin to describe them. Guess it may as well be chronological.

Our orders came in at noon - to go to another Evac a little way along. We groaned at that but were glad to go anywhere. Took a little side trip en route to visit our HQ for some mail - 2 letters from you (bringing me up to July 25th). Then a two hour jaunt to our destination. There we found many of our old friends as several other teams were there. Between the HQ and the other place we must have seen almost half of our pals,- (many of the ones who came in on the other American beach on D2) for the first time - so we had lots to bull over. Arrived at the Evac. in time for a good supper & a shower. About nine-thirty, further orders came - exciting ones. We joined a platoon of a F.H. which drove in all loaded up and set out on a most superb odyssey which is not yet ended.

I have spoken to you of the difficulty involved in supplying medical care to rapidly advancing armored units - units progressing 40 or more miles a day. Their problem of evacuation is terrific,- carrying wounded over a hundred miles through invaded but not captured territory. Our trip and recent work is one attempt to answer that problem

(am now writing 2 days later - we got real busy.)

We set out across (deleted) as it got dark, and later, as the full moon came out in a cloudless sky, we journeyed through the beautiful countryside, bathed in the warm moonlight. It was indescribably beautiful. Since I had a map, and since I was in on the Colonel's briefing, I was instructed to lead the column - so I played a triple role of navigator, guide, and convoy commander. With bridges out, sign posts down, detours, road-blocks, etc., it was constant work. The next morning was very colorful and exciting.

To understand our situation you must know a little of the type of war armored columns fight. They knife through a country - reducing strong points, fortifications, artillery, etc. They never stop to mop up, but keep on the move. The mop-up is for the infantry later on. It results that your armored units and the enemy forces are all over the same place - there is no front - only a constantly changing situation,- little fights here & there - towns taken & retaken - groups of enemy filtering around areas cut off - and the French underground - out in the open at last, with rifles & guns captured from the Jerry or dropped by us by parachute. Hundreds of them, smoking out the Germans - attacking little garrisons -

patrolling roads, etc. In the midst of this fluctuating and chaotic situation there are two things which speak with authority and offer protection - one is power - armored equipment or numbers of armed men - the other is the Red Cross - vehicles, tents, & armbands. The Jerrys know that their only hope of escaping utter annihilation is to respect the medical neutrality.

But to continue our story - by mid morning we were smack in the middle of this type of situation. We arrived at the approaches to a town where the Germans had dropped 2000 parachutists - they had taken the town & blown up the bridge, and when we drove up, they were engaged in a lively little skirmish with the French; we had to by pass them over little country roads, where we were the first Americans they had seen. Our reception was enthusiastic. As I rode in the jeep at the head of the column through the little towns, the entire population was lined up to cheer us - showered us with flowers, food, cognac, kisses & cheers. The men had formed into bands of militia & were marching along the roads & singing - Everywhere the sign of the V for Victory is given as a salute. I was kissed by more people - (& some of them very beautiful French gals, m'dear).

Four of the French came with me for guides, as they knew where the Jerries were. We passed one French platoon led by a beautiful girl - with a short plaid skirt and loose blouse, a shock of black wavy hair, shining teeth and laughing but grim eyes, carrying a tommy gun and 4 hand grenades. What a picture she was! In another town, the people were burying their dead, in a colorful procession led by the priest with his cross, and the hearse horse-drawn and very ornate. We finally made contact with the unit we were supposed to support, & bedded down for a night's rest after our 24 hours steady travel. The next day we moved again, and finally set-up in a little town which was ours at the time. Fortunately it still is, though up until yesterday, Jerry had the one back up the road 4 miles, and another 3 miles over. They've gotten them out though by now.

During the first day I occasionally had to go ahead of the column to scout our route. Driving into town was always exciting. You could never be quite sure whose town it was! The thing was though, you just keep on the go - Don't stop until you're sure. And the Germans respected our Red Cross. I am sure that many times we were right in the middle of the Germans - in the hedge-rows or hidden in the towns, - yet in all that trip I was shot at only once, and we were going too fast for him to do more than just come close.

We, that is, the hospital have taken many prisoners. They filter in in small groups & surrender, or drive in in trucks, waving the white flag, to give themselves up. I had four surrender to me in my ambulance the first day, but I couldn't handle them as we weren't set up, so turned them over to a recon car. They won't surrender to the French, as they are afraid to - with good reason. The latter are not taking prisoners.

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The trip was an unforgettable one - (deleted) is beautiful, and the people here are also beautiful - well built, strong, friendly and clean (in spite of lack of plumbing). The women are, in general, quite lovely, and the men good-looking. In their present state of wild elation they communicate to us a little of what it means to have freedom once again. They look upon us as liberators, and evidence much feeling for Americans (in contrast to Britons).

Then, for three days now we have been hard at work. This has been made more difficult because of the inexperience & inefficiency of the F.H. we are with. We have been lacking in some vital supplies - the food poor & scanty, etc. But these things will straighten out. Meanwhile, our work continues, and all is well. Some of our infantry has at last caught up with us, (once they were 80 miles behind us).

Lots of love, darling -

H

P.S. The Medical Corps will soon have captured all the Jerrys in France, and will have liberated the country. It's a wonderful war - but for the wounded.